

May 24, 2017

## Information Letter

Dear Parents/Guardians of the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board:

Recently, Netflix released ***13 Reasons Why***, a series based on a fictional, young adult novel. The premise of this series is that the main character, a teen girl, has died by suicide and has left audio tapes explaining why she made this choice. The tapes are sent to people in her life that she labels as “responsible”. The series includes graphic content related to suicide, glamorization of suicidal behavior, negative portrayals of helpers (including school guidance counsellors), sexual assault and substance use. Students are exposed to many things through popular media; however, given the sensitive nature of this subject matter it is imperative that families of HWCDSB students be aware of and equipped with tools to support children and youth who may watch this series. While the series may not pose risks for most students, it has the potential for harm for students who may be struggling with a mental health problem and/or suicidal ideation.

This series presents an important opportunity for parents to talk about issues that are very real for their school aged children. To make the most of this opportunity, it is important that parents/guardians approach conversations in an informed, balanced, and supportive manner. Some suggestions recommended by School Mental Health ASSIST include:

- 1) If your child has not already watched the series but would like to, review it first yourself.
- 2) Discuss with your child the pros and cons of watching it.
- 3) Decide ahead of time if there are certain scenes you will skip.
- 4) Watch it together. Watch your child as s/he watches the show.
- 5) Avoid “binge-watching” and allow time for your child to think, and talk, about the material between episodes.
- 6) If your child has already watched the show, ask them about it. Use open-ended questions about their impressions. Listen and support, but also use this time to clarify misinformation.
- 7) Be watchful, be there, and listen, in coming days.
- 8) Help your child identify positive coping strategies that they can use.
- 9) Know where to get help if your child shows signs of emotional difficulty.

If you have concerns about your child, check in with your family doctor, school principal, or another trusted professional. You can also get help through: COAST the local crisis line at 905-972-8338 ([www.coasthamilton.ca](http://www.coasthamilton.ca)); Kids Help Phone at 1-800-668-6868 ([www.kidshelpphone.ca](http://www.kidshelpphone.ca)); or the Mental Health Helpline at 1-866-531-2600 ([www.mentalhealthhelpline.ca](http://www.mentalhealthhelpline.ca)). **Call 911 in a Mental Health Emergency.**